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SUBJECT: DRC ELECTION AUTHORITIES SEEKS TO AVOID ABUSE OF PARTIAL
ELECTION RESULTS

REF: KINSHASA 1689

Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet Distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Representatives of presidential candidates Kabila and Bemba signed an agreement November 1 not to publish partial election results. Two newspapers have been suspended by the High Media Authority (HAM) for abusive extrapolation of partial results. HAM President Mutinga has reportedly lowered his profile in the face of apparent threats. Despite the efforts of many, including our Embassy, it will be hard to keep the genie of provocative election results in the bottle. End Summary

The CEI/HAM Agreement on (Not) Reporting Results

¶2. (U) Representatives of presidential candidates President Joseph Kabila and Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba signed an agreement November 1 pledging to avoid publication of partial election results. Kabila advisers Samba Kaputo and Marcellin Cishambo signed for the president, and MLC officials Jean Lucien Bussa and Romain Nimy signed for Bemba. Also signing the agreement were the president of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) Apollinaire Malu Malu, and the president of the High Media Authority (HAM) Modeste Mutinga. They did so in the presence of DSRSG Ross Mountain.

¶3. (U) The agreement also reminds political and social groups that they are proscribed from extrapolating from partial results to announce the victory of either (presidential) candidate, before the CEI officially announces provisional results (expected before November 19).

HAM Action to Keep the Genie in the Bottle

¶4. (U) On November 1 and 2, the HAM suspended two Kinshasa newspapers for 30 days, respectively, pro-UDPS Alerte Plus, for headlining that Bemba had won and taken power, and Top Info for publishing made-up results.

¶5. (SBU) An electronic journal called Congoindependant.com, published in Brussels by a group of Congolese journalists, has also published at least one article extrapolating a victory for Jean-Pierre Bemba, based on a seemingly scientific sampling of partial results. The article's statistics have been picked up by an unidentified source, who is sending them out via text messages to the DRC. It attributes the statistics to the U.S. Embassy. (Note: Immediately after the first round of elections, July 30, crude tracts appeared in Kinshasa with bogus results attributed to both USAID and Vatican Radio. End note.)

¶6. (SBU) Meanwhile, the president of the High Media Authority, Modeste Mutinga, has been obliged to take some evasive action in response to reported threats made against him. International media NGO PANOS is paying for extra security and lodgings elsewhere in town for Mutinga. PANOS and the French Embassy report that the threats seem to be prompted by the fact that the HAM (despite considerable effort on its part) was not able to organize a televised debate between Kabila and Bemba. Another reason is said to be the HAM's failure to get state television RTNC to air a promised interview with Bemba on October 27 (reftel). Mutinga reportedly takes some pride in the fact that the resulting suspension he imposed on RTNC is yet another reason for threats, these coming from the other side of the political spectrum.

¶7. (U) At the request of the CEI, PAO formally addressed 100 journalists October 24, at the CEI press center, on their responsibilities with respect to the handling of partial election results, a subject we have covered in several of our Embassy's many workshops for journalists throughout the country this year. HAM president Mutinga reiterated the message at the signing ceremony on November 1.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Journalists by and large seek, sometimes valiantly, to exercise restraint and responsibility in handling partial election results. Those working for partisan media especially complain to us that their political paymasters have other ideas, however. In the DRC, political campaigning seems curiously to be more a post-election phenomenon. Political pressures are such, therefore, that some partial election results will be published prematurely and/or erroneously, notwithstanding the November 1 agreement. Once the CEI starts to publish confirmed partial results on its website, which we expect to happen soon, the manipulation of bogus partial results will dissipate. Tension over the outcome,

KINSHASA 00001701 002 OF 002

however, will not. End comment.
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